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SENSITIVE

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV

For OBO/REPM/ACQ - Mike Lash

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [ABLD](#) [AMGT](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: Ambassador's September 17 Meeting with Vice

Foreign Minister Le Van Bang

Ref: A) Hanoi 2149 B) State

161328 C) State 159268 D) Hanoi 25951.

(SBU) Summary and Comment: The Ambassador met September 17 with Vice

Foreign Minister Le Van Bang. Bang's first piece of business was to inform the Ambassador that the President had agreed to receive the Ambassador's credentials "earlier than normal," specifically "later this month." VFM Bang agreed that the acquisition of the new Embassy compound was a critical issue that required both sides' attention and urged the USG to talk with the Russians, just as the GVN would continue to do. All that was left was to "sign the deal" with them, Bang claimed. The VFM expressed his hope that he and the Ambassador would be able to meet regularly to "sort out" issues and added that, regardless of what might arise, at the end of the day it was the bilateral relationship that was most important. Bang's tone was upbeat; surprisingly, he passed on the opportunity to raise the recent designation of Vietnam as a "Country of Particular Concern." End Summary and Comment.2. (SBU) The Ambassador, accompanied by DCM and Pol/C, met September 17 with Vice Foreign Minister Le Van Bang. This was the Ambassador's first meeting with VFM Bang since the late 1980s. VFM Bang opened by recalling that he had first met the Ambassador when the latter was Deputy Director of the Office of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia Affairs and had traveled to Vietnam in 1989 and 1990 for humanitarian discussions. Bang expressed his hope that the Ambassador would be able to continue to improve relations as he had done during his previous contacts with Vietnam. VFM Bang informed the Ambassador that, although Vietnam's President normally accepted the credentials of new ambassadors only four times a year -- with the next ceremony scheduled for November -- MFA had learned September 16 that the Ambassador and several other newcomers would have the opportunity to present their credentials "later this month." Bang noted that this was a "privilege" and quickly added that one of his responsibilities was state protocol.3. (SBU) In response to the Ambassador's question about his other responsibilities beyond U.S.-Vietnam relations and state protocol, Bang said that he was also in charge of international organizations and U.N. affairs, as well as the administrative, financial and budget issues of foreign missions. As such, he had a key role to play in the USG's desired acquisition of land for a new Embassy compound (NEC) (Refs A, B, C, and see para 7 for background). Bang complained that he had tried to work with the Russians, but they seemed to be having problems coming to closure on the deal. The Ambassador remarked that time was not on our side, noting that the money earmarked for the project would not be available forever and that the Hanoi People's Committee appeared to be shopping around the property. Bang said that Vietnam was equally interested in acquiring property in Washington, D.C. (for \$10 million) and agreed with the Ambassador that this was an issue of reciprocity. MFA's Legal Department Director General, who was in charge of the NEC negotiation, had informed Bang September 16 that he planned to speak with the Russian Ambassador about this issue and ask that they "resume" their deal as soon as possible. Both sides had agreed on a price last December, and all that was left was to sign. The GVN would continue to work with the Russians, but the USG should also weigh in with the Russians, Bang suggested.

4. (SBU) Bang said that there were many other issues on which both he and the Ambassador would have to focus their attention and expressed his hope that they would be able to sit down soon and "sort them out" the way he had down with Ambassadors Peterson and Burghardt. Although he himself had been dealing with American issues since 1989, it seemed that, in the American system, people moved in and out of jobs every two or three years, he observed.

5. (SBU) Bang noted that in light of the early October ASEM 5 Summit in Hanoi and November APEC Summit in Santiago, he was "very busy." However, he would see the Ambassador again on the occasion of the presentation of his credentials and agreed that they should try to find time to meet again soon. The Ambassador noted that Ambassador Burghardt had always valued the chance to work quietly and constructively with Bang and, although not always seeing eye-to-eye, they were

able to solve some issues and to keep others under control. Bang agreed, saying that it was important to work together officially, unofficially, privately, or "otherwise," because, at the end of the day, it was the bilateral relationship that was most important.6. (SBU) Comment: Bang's tone was upbeat and forward-looking. In contrast with the Ambassador's conversation the day before with Assistant Foreign Minister Hung (Ref D), there was no mention of the religious freedom issue or the Department's designation of Vietnam as a country of particular concern.7. (U) NEC Background: Embassy Hanoi officers met July 29 with Le Van Bang. This was the Ambassador's first meeting with VFM Bang since the late 1980s. VFM Bang opened by recalling that he had first met the Ambassador when the latter was Deputy Director of the Office of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia Affairs and had traveled to Vietnam in 1989 and 1990 for humanitarian discussions. Bang expressed his hope that the Ambassador would be able to continue to improve relations as he had done during his previous contacts with Vietnam. VFM Bang informed the Ambassador that, although Vietnam's President normally accepted the credentials of new ambassadors only four times a year -- with the next ceremony scheduled for November -- MFA had learned September 16 that the Ambassador and several other newcomers would have the opportunity to present their credentials "later this month." Bang noted that this was a "privilege" and quickly added that one of his responsibilities was state protocol.3. (SBU) In response to the Ambassador's question about his other responsibilities beyond U.S.-Vietnam relations and state protocol, Bang said that he was also in charge of international organizations and U.N. affairs, as well as the administrative, financial and budget issues of foreign missions. As such, he had a key role to play in the USG's desired acquisition of land for a new Embassy compound (NEC) (Refs A, B, C, and see para 7 for background). Bang complained that he had tried to work with the Russians, but they seemed to be having problems coming to closure on the deal. The Ambassador remarked that time was not on our side, noting that the money earmarked for the project would not be available forever and that the Hanoi People's Committee appeared to be shopping around the property. Bang said that Vietnam was equally interested in acquiring property in Washington, D.C. (for \$10 million) and agreed with the Ambassador that this was an issue of reciprocity. MFA's Legal Department Director General, who was in charge of the NEC negotiation, had informed Bang September 16 that he planned to speak with the Russian Ambassador about this issue and ask that they "resume" their deal as soon as possible. Both sides had agreed on a price last December, and all that was left was to sign. The GVN would continue to work with the Russians, but the USG should also weigh in with the Russians, Bang suggested.

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Diplomatic Services Bureau General Director Xuong, at which time he stated a "strong desire" to settle the NEC matter with the Russians before September 30 (the end of the GVN's fiscal year). Xuong claimed that the GVN's efforts to finalize the agreement with Russia were stymied by a reorganization of the Russian Foreign Ministry. He explained that it was unclear which Russian MFA directorate/vice-minister had responsibility for this particular initiative. When asked if the GVN would consider starting "informal" discussions with the USG regarding possible acquisition costs, protocols, etc., Ambassador Xuong reiterated the Vietnamese position that it would not commence direct GVN-USG negotiations until his government had regained full legal rights to the property. Note: the GVN and Russian MFA appear to have already agreed a price (\$2 million) to offset Russian infrastructure improvements to the site. End Background.MARINE